

U.S. Senators Heitkamp, Moran, King & Boozman – Connect With Veterans Act

As servicemembers transition from the military to civilian life, one of the most critical parts of this transition is the short period of time after they separate from the military and begin to settle into their community. Too often, veterans do not have access to basic information on local services and many communities have few ways to connect with them.

The goal of Senators Heitkamp, Moran, King and Boozman's *Connect with Veterans Act* is to remedy this gap by providing new veterans with better access to information they choose to receive about existing services and benefits from local, state, and federal entities. Specifically, the *Connect With Veterans Act* would:

- **Create a Voluntary, Tailored Directory of Contact Information:** The directory would allow new veterans to more easily access to services and resources in their communities. They would select only the types of information they are interested in receiving – such as health care, education, employment, and housing – and allow states and communities to shape their outreach to veterans based on those needs.
- **Give Veterans Control Over their Information:** The directory would allow veterans to control which types of entities can contact them about services and tools available to them – whether it is the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), state VA departments or their local government.
- **Provide Better, More Localized Outreach:** The directory would allow local governments to use the contact information provided by veterans to reach out to them about more specific programs and services available in their communities.

Participation in the program is voluntary and a veteran's contact information would only be shared with his or her permission. Veterans' personal information will be kept safe and secure.

Although many federal and state programs focus on outreach to veterans, most local communities often lack dedicated personnel to connect with veterans. This bill would give local communities the chance to plan for the kinds of services veterans might need and deserve as well as make contact with them and their families at the earliest possible point in the transition process. Such outreach would improve veterans' access to local services and opportunities, including invaluable personal support on employment and career development, VA facilities, college campuses, veterans service organizations, and health and human services. Access to a secure directory of contact information for interested veterans would also allow communities to improve their partnerships with employers and other organizations that offer services and benefit veterans.

Key Provisions

- **Tailored Directory:** The VA Secretary would establish a directory of participating veterans and share the information with participating entities – including the VA, state VAs, local governments, and Indian tribes – tailored to the expressed interests of each veteran.
- **Limited, Secure Information:** The bill requires the VA Secretary to protect the privacy of individuals participating in the program and the security of the information stored in the national directory. This information would be limited to the name, e-mail address, postal address, and phone number of the participating veteran.
- **Prohibits Commercial Use of Information:** The bill would bar communities from selling veterans' information, providing it to a for-profit or political entities, or from requiring an individual or family to purchase a product or service.
- **Consistent Improvement:** The bill would require a report monitoring the success of the directory's implementation and would work to identify ways to improve program.
- **Public Outreach:** The bill would require the VA to develop a plan to publicize the program and inform veterans and local communities of the benefits of participation.
- **Streamlined Information:** The bill would encourage the Department of Defense to leverage the collection of information under the Transition Assistance Program and the VA to leverage the eBenefits system as appropriate.